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**MONTANA INDEPENDENT LIVING PROJECT**  
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51st SESSION WELL UNDERWAY

The 51st session of the Montana Legislature is approaching the half way point. On February 22, at the close of business that day, the folks will take a well-deserved break until Monday, February 27. To say it has been interesting would be at best understatement. The situation is no different than in any other session - requests for more revenue than exists in even the most optimistic projections. However, with the problem with the school foundation program, coupled with the Workers' Compensation shortfall, this legislature has much more to sort out in terms of what should and what shouldn't be funded. Those working at the session, both legislators and all the rest, are worthy of our praise. Being a legislator at this particular session is not enviable. Many tough decisions have to be made, in fact, are already being made. A key ingredient in the processes is that the legislators are showing a commitment to human services, a factor which has not always been present in the past.

Issues affecting people with disabilities are great not only in number but also in scope. Medicaid funding, personal care, minimum wage, accessibility, Medicare assignment, vocational rehabilitation, just to mention a few. The outcome on many issues will not be decided until the 90th day, or the last day, whichever comes last. We are hopeful for a good showing, that our causes will be viewed as moving toward equality, independence, that we have the same access to life's offerings as people without disabilities, as opposed to attempts to ply the legislature with guilt, pity and sympathy, none of which we need. However, a stiff \$50 parking fine every now and then doesn't hinder our move toward independence and equality!



## COMMUNICATION: A KEY TO SUCCESS

The session of this Montana Legislature is approaching the half way point and many issues remain. Appropriations are still to be decided and bills are still being introduced. It is a prime opportunity for each of us to participate in the legislative process and have some impact on our futures. It's an exciting time in which decisions are being made daily on the administrative and legislative levels, whether we influence their outcome or not. It is important to realize that most state and local officials consider primarily two factors when determining their decisions on legislation and policy: **1).** They act on behalf of what they think is right; and **2).** They are sensitive to public opinion within their own constituencies.

What a politician thinks is right hinges on many factors, a number of which are beyond our control. Public opinion, however, is what we contribute to. The complexities of issues before our legislators are such that he/she finds it difficult to determine his/her own position. This is where we come in. By writing to our representatives and senators, we have an excellent opportunity to influence public opinion as well as their own opinions. There is responsibility that goes with our communication. Here are some pointers for making our communication as effective as possible.

**1).** Be informed regarding the facts. Know the pros and cons about the issue. If at all possible, know your legislator's position as well. **2).** Be positive and constructive. Avoid criticism. Compliment him/her on some recent action. In fact, it wouldn't hurt to devote an entire letter of praise or thanks for some constructive proposal or action. They seldom receive such gratitude. They need to hear the good, too. **3).** Make your letter personal. Each letter should be individualized and written in your own words. Never send form letters. **4).** If possible, use a typewriter. If hand written, write legibly, with words spelled correctly and care given to proper

grammar. **5).** Make your letter timely. Be sure to send your letter as the bill is being considered before his/her particular legislative body. You may wish to refer to past votes on the same or similar issues. **6).** Keep your letter to the point. By being brief and limiting your comments to a single issue, your letter will have a better chance of receiving full attention. Be sure to refer to the accurate title and numebr of the bill. **7).** Never antagonize! Instead, be friendly. You should not pose as the "enemy" of the legislator. Never imply threat. **8).** Make suggestions in a positive way. It is the best way to promote any changes in upcoming legislation.

Remember, state your position clearly. You have an unlimited opportunity for exercising creative influence. Keep in mind that often legislators receive very little mail, so you who express your opinion magnify your influence



## LONG TERM CARE CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

ELENA -- A growing group of state organizations announced the formation of the Montana Long Term Care Campaign on February 13, 1989. The statewide campaign is dedicated to enacting comprehensive federal legislation to protect American families against the devastating costs of long term care.

The first activity of the Campaign will be Senator Max Baucus spending Tuesday, February 14th working as a family caregiver. Senator Baucus is Vice Chair of the bi-partisan Long Term Care Commission recently established by Congress to review and make recommendations on the problem.

The Campaign organizers represent seniors, the disabled, consumer groups, unions and religious groups such as: the Montana Senior citizens Association, the American Association of Retired Persons and the Alzheimer's Association, among others.

"Long term care is a family crisis affecting tens of thousands of working families here in Montana

who must care for the critical health needs of grandparents, parents, and their children," said Earl Reilly, President of the Montana Senior Citizens Association. "Families must be protected from the devastating financial effects of long term care through a comprehensive, universal government program."

More than 100 national organizations are part of the national Long Term Care Campaign. "Family Caregiver Day" events are being sponsored by statewide campaigns with Members of Congress in more than a dozen states during February and March in an attempt to call the attention of the public and the policymakers to the financial and emotional problems of families who provide long term care.

"Millions of dollars come out of the pockets of hard pressed working families in Montana every year to meet long term care needs," said Reilly. "The campaign feels that government has an obligation to begin to solve the problem."



## NEW OFFICERS FOR MILP BOARD

Out-going MILP Board of Directors President Mike White announced that Kathy Collins was elected President of the Board at the Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors, January 13, 1989. Also elected at the meeting were Gordon Hage, Vice-president and Bob Rae, Secretary - Treasurer. Several Board members retired after serving us well. They are Bob Liston, Lee Barkman, Orrie Main Bull and Scotty MacLeod. We especially want to extend a heart-felt thank you to Scotty.

He served on the Board for five years, some of which were difficult, having to close two offices, re-opening an outreach office, establishing Part A services, etc. Scotty's leadership and foresight were appreciated and will be long remembered. We wish him the best in his continued role in working with people with disabilities. Our paths are sure to cross frequently in the coming years.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH JIM SMITH M.A.R. LOBBYIST

Prior to the November election, FOCUS asked the two gubernatorial candidates to provide information on specific issues relating to people with disabilities. One of the candidates' staff indicated to us that the bulk of the questions asked of them were related to human services. The assumption we and others made was that human services programs and funding for the programs would be in for scrutiny and require a vigorous defense by human services professionals and consumers.

In view of the above, FOCUS recently visited with Jim Smith, Director of Region VIII Human Resource Development Councils and lobbyist for the Montana Association for Rehabilitation. We asked Smith what the general attitude in the legislature was toward human services. He feels that the attitude has improved greatly over the four previous sessions. There appears to be a heightened awareness and increased recognition that these services are necessary. Human Services have come a long way in legislative acceptance. The battle for acceptance is over and the general concensus is that most of the services are necessary, they are being efficiently managed and are reaching the people who need them. Arguments on behalf of services that touch on prevention, maintenance of health and improved quality of life have been well received. It is no longer necessary to fight for mere existence. In fact, it is generally agreed that a broad array of services is essential.

According to Smith, the question is not do we need the services, but how do we fund the services we need. It seems the human services community should be rethinking its position, or lack of position, on revenue enhancements. Smith said that Representative Dorothy Bradley, Bozeman, has been working on a sales tax for several years, with the expectation to funnel additional funds into human services programs.

Smith commented that it was commendable that Priorities for People III was aware of the revenue side of the issue and was willing to approach alternatives to increase revenues. At a joint Subcommittee on Human Services hearing on January 31, Rep. Dorothy Cody, Wolf Point, remarked that no one is coming forward from the field with suggestions on how to increase revenues.

Smith also reflected on what appears to be the most difficult issue to deal with in this session of the legislature. There are two issues according to Smith. The first was funding for Vocational Rehabilitation services, specifically the issue of availability of certain funds from the Workers' Compensation Division which are tied to industrially injured and in need of vocational rehabilitation. What fuels the problem is a difference between the two agencies on how the funds from an insurance fund can be spent. At time of publication, it appears that this problem is being favorably resolved.

The second issue, on the other hand, will be more difficult to come to resolution. It revolves around Medicaid. It is not likely, Smith said, that solutions to Medicaid problems will come until the 90th day. Various Medicaid optional services are coming under intense scrutiny, with all sides acknowledging a need for watchfulness. Perhaps the heart of the matter lies in an acceptable and reasonable definition of "medical necessity". Medicaid services fitting the definition of "medically necessary" can be covered expenses but the breadth of the definition is what needs agreement from all sides.

Medicaid service providers need to provide the Department of S.R.S. with cost containment plans and those of us interested in and working with human services organizations need to encourage providers to do so.

## SMITH (cont.)

It is crucial for us to contact our local legislators and let them know our positions on any issues which affect people with disabilities. If they are not informed of our positions and in turn support legislation contrary to what we feel is in our best interests, we have no one to blame but ourselves. **MILP can assist with our legislative telephone call system. Call the office at 1-800-233-0805 or if in Helena at 442-5755 for further information.**

### FEDERAL UPDATE

During the 100th session of Congress, a significant piece of legislation which deals with civil rights for people with disabilities was introduced, known as the Americans with Disabilities Act, SB 2345. The legendary section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 paved the way for changes at the federal level in regard to discrimination against people with disabilities. SB 2345 would make discrimination against people with disabilities unlawful in other sectors as well. Although there was a large amount of activity surrounding the bill, Congress took no action on the bill. However, supporters of the proposed legislation promise a big push to elicit action from Congress and passage of the bill. All Montanans with disabilities and advocates for the disabled are encouraged to write their local Representatives and Senators. Montana's contingent can be reached as follows: Max Baucus and Conrad Burns at the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510-2602. Pat Williams and Ron Marlenee at the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515. Encourage our Senators and Representatives to be co-sponsors as well as supporters of this important piece of legislation.

Several pieces of important legislation were passed during the 100th session. Some affecting people with disabilities were as follows: P.L. 100-542 The Telecommunications Accessibility Enhancement Act. This Act requires an expansion

of our national telecommunications system for the benefit of individuals who are hearing or speech-impaired by 1). Continuing the existing federal relay system for TDD users and expanding it by adding at least one operator; 2). Requiring the development and publication of a directory of TDD's and other devices as well as TDD numbers; 3). Adopting the design of a standard logo to indicate the presence of a TDD or other device. P.L. 100-394 The Hearing Aid Compatibility Act. This Act requires that "essential telephones" as well as all telephones imported or manufactured in the United States, other than for export, after one year from the date of enactment "provide internal means of effective use with hearing aids that are designed to be used with telephones." P.L. 100-641 The L. Richardson Preyer Federal Building, and the United States Courthouse, Designation - and - Uniform System of Handicapped Parking. A couple of bills that were introduced which would have required states to adopt a uniform system of handicapped parking were not passed. These bills would have had an impact on highway funds if states had failed to comply. Instead, P.L. 100-641 establishes a uniform system, but only encourages states to adopt such a system.

Anyone interested in getting a copy of any of the laws can get one copy of up to six laws by writing to: United States Senate Documents Room, Senate Hart Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510-7106.

### SUPPORT GROUP INFORMATION

#### Helena:

MS Support Group - Second Saturday of each month, MILP office, 38 South Last Chance Gulch, at 10:30 a.m.

Traumatic Brain Injured - Every other Tuesday at St. Paul's Methodist Church at 7:00 p.m.

Diabetes Support Group - Second Monday of each month at the recreation hall at Fort Harrison VA Center at 7:00 p.m.

## **SUPPORT GROUP INFORMATION**

Disabled Women's Support Group - Monthly meeting, date varies. Call Judy Harris at MILP 442-5755.

AIDS Support Network - Weekly meetings, by invitation only. 24 hour hotline 442-1079.

### **Bozeman:**

Traumatic Brain Injured - Third Thursday of each month at 7.30 p.m. For more information call Len Healy at 388-1535.

### **Butte:**

MS Support Group - Second Wednesday of each month at the Butte Community Center on Front Street. Call Jack Keely at 494-4073.

**If you are aware of any disability support group which meets and is not listed here, please forward information to Tim Harris, FOCUS Editor, 38 South Last Chance Gulch, Helena, Montana 59601.**

Montana Independent Living Project  
38 So. Last Chance Gulch  
Helena, Montana 59601

## **MILP DOES IT AGAIN III**

Last year, MILP was instrumental in helping establish the Yellowstone Valley Center for Independent Living as a free-standing, consumer-driven independent living center. This year, we have been at it again, working in the Great Falls area to accomplish the same feat.

Assisting Zana with the training were Tom Seekins, Research and Training Center - Rural in Missoula, Bob Maffit, SRS in Helena, Larry Harlan, Visual Services in Great Falls, and Jeanne Dussault, Independent Living Specialist in our Great Falls Office.

From a large number of candidates for the board, several were selected and trained to be board of directors for North Central Independent Living Services (NCILS). Those individuals are Marilyn Gone, Larry Harlan, Kathy Biscup, Jim Clark, and Dan Goodau, Great Falls; David Doland, Ulm; Roland Kennerly, Browning; Larry Nitz, Havre; James Farar, Shelby; and Kay Dorr, Glasgow.

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